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IS INFANT BAPTISM
UNWARRANTED ?

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From the author.



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WE are told that the primitive Church was Baptist. That the apostles knew nothing of any baptism but that of adults. That they understood by the word 'baptism' the immersion of an adult believer in the name of the Trinity and that this was the only conception they had of the matter. In fact, that the entire primitive church was Baptist. All the Christians in Jerusalem, converted on and after the Day of Pentecost, and all the Christians in different parts of Judea, and all the Christians converted in foreign lands, Jews or Gentiles, Ephesians, Philippians, Corinthians, Romans, Thessalonians, Colossians, and in fact the members of all the churches planted by the apostles and their fellow-workers, were all Baptists, with

regard to their idea of the subjects and the mode of baptism. The Apostolic Church was a unit in this particular.

The next generation of Christians, consisting largely of the children of the former, would of course be Baptists. No such thing was known as infant baptism; there were none in the church who had been baptized in infancy; no minister had ever administered baptism to an infant; it would have seemed like an absurdity; the Church of Christ, built upon the foundation of apostles and prophets, had learned from its founders what baptism was, and it would be easier for them to give up the rite altogether than to entertain the idea that it might be given to infants. From the beginning it had stood in marked and unmistakable contrast with circumcision, in this respect.

As it must have been with the second generation, so it must have been with the third. All were Baptists. In ten thousand churches, throughout the known world, there was no such thing as a Christian who had been baptized in infancy.

We can imagine the reception that would have been given to a Paedo-Baptist, presenting himself to the churches as an advocate of Paedo-Baptism, using the arguments now used by Paedo-Baptists. He would have been greeted with a universal shout of amazement and derision. "What! do you mean to say that our Lord made a mistake in teaching the apostles and other disciples that heard him, the nature of baptism, the mode of it, and its proper subjects? Or do you mean to say that the entire apostolic band agreed to plant the church of Christ upon a wrong basis in this respect? Where in all the world are your Paedo-Baptists, claiming an apostolic origin? You might as well teach at once that circumcision has never been abrogated, and that baptism was never intended to take the place of it."

We know how conservative the Baptist churches of modern times are. We know what a shock it would give to their feelings, if any of their number should begin to recommend infant baptism. What

an extraordinary thing it would be if all the Baptist churches in the world would become Paedo-Baptist ! One is almost ready to use the language of the unbelieving lord of Samaria, " If God would make windows in heaven, could such a thing be ? " Yet the Baptists of our day are surrounded by and intermingled with churches that hold the views they deprecate, and are continually coming in contact with arguments that favour those views, and thus their position is widely different from that which we attribute to the primitive Apostolic Baptist Church. According to the supposition, the Baptist Church of the first and second centuries, was the only church. The Church of Christ, the Church Catholic, was Baptist, and infant baptism had never been heard of.

We have said that it would be a truly extraordinary thing, if all the Baptists now living should become Paedo-Baptists. But how much more extraordinary it would be, if after becoming Paedo-Baptists, they would one and all declare that

they never had been any thing else! That there never had been a Baptist Church in the world! And if they would defy any body to point to any period when the church had been divided on the subject, when the baptism of infants had been withheld and denied and resisted in their churches! These suppositions will appear so wild and preposterous to our readers, that they will be impatient with us for mentioning them. They will say to us: "The slightest movement in favour of infant baptism would be met in the Baptist churches by the utmost possible resistance. Believing that baptism is only for believers, they do not regard infant baptism as any baptism at all. They hold that a believer who does not put on Christ by water baptism is guilty of disobedience, and they resist the entrance of Paedo-Baptist views as they would resist a proposition to add the apochryphal books to the Bible, or receive the traditions of Rome. If we conceive of a change that would make all Baptist churches to be Paedo-Baptist, it is evident that it could

not be brought about without a great struggle, a great conflict, the gradual use and spread of the new doctrine, the array of party against party, constituting one of the most marked periods in all church history."

Very well. This answer teaches us just what we are to expect, when, assuming the Apostolic church to have been Baptist, we look at what the Christian church was in the second, third and fourth centuries.

Augustine who lived in the fourth century, says :

"The whole church practises Infant Baptism; it was not instituted by Councils, but was always in use."

Let us look at this testimony. No one could be more competent in that age to say what was the attitude of the Church of Christ towards this doctrine. He had relations with Christians in all parts of the Roman Empire, East and West, and no one doubts that what he says is true, namely that all Christian churches throughout the world practised Infant Baptism. Furthermore, every body who

is conversant with the writings of Augustine, will admit that he was well acquainted with Ecclesiastical History. He was well acquainted with what had taken place in the Church of Christ, from the times of the Apostles down. In his Library were the principal authors of the three preceding centuries whether Christian or anti-Christian, whether orthodox or heterodox. But he has not the least hesitation in affirming, without fear of contradiction, that infant baptism had always been in use throughout the Church of Christ, from the apostles down. Now, on the supposition that the Apostolic Church was Baptist, here is a mystery. How could the whole Church, in Europe, Asia and Africa, planted in 10,000 localities, become suddenly and stealthily Paedo-Baptist, without the slightest trace of a conflict, and all with one consent agree to say that they never had been Baptists? Augustine says that "*he did not remember ever to have read of any person, whether Catholic or heretic, who maintained that Baptism ought to be denied to*

infants." "This, (the baptism of infants,) the Church has always maintained."

Origen, who lived a century and a half earlier, (born A. D. 184) says :

"Infants are baptized for the remission of sins."—"The Church hath received the tradition from the Apostles that Baptism ought to be ministered to infants."

The word 'tradition' means something handed down whether orally or by writing. So Paul says to the Thessalonians, "Brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which you have been taught, whether by word or our epistle." Thus we see that Origen, who was a great student and book-worm, and who lived so near to the apostolic age that he may possibly have seen some one who had seen the apostle John, declares positively, without fear of contradiction, that the baptism of infants was a custom handed down from the apostles.

The question is not whether any wrong ideas as to the nature and efficiency of baptism had pervaded the church. We know that the Church became corrupt in

many respects, and gradually went far away from the simplicity of the Gospel. And the rise and spread of these various corruptions are easily traced. They were met by resistance and remonstrance, and only made their way by degrees. But with regard to an external rite like baptism, it is inconceivable that the entire church throughout the world, should consent to give it to all infant children of Christians, in the face of the alleged fact that in the Apostolic Church a clear line of distinction between baptism and circumcision was drawn, in this respect. The Jews in the ages from Moses to Christ went far away from the truth which had been delivered to them, but they held fast to circumcision. In general, the more a church departs from the spiritual laws given to her, the more particular will she be in the observance of external rites.

It was the presence of *debated questions* in the early Church, that led to the calling of Councils for their decision. If infant baptism was then a debated question, it would certainly have occupied a conspi-

cnous place in the Councils. But the only occasion when it was brought forward was in the Council of Carthage, A. D. 252 and 253, when 66 Bishops were present, Cyprian presiding. This question was brought forward: "Is it lawful to baptize infants before they are eight days old?" The question was not as to the lawfulness of infant baptism; nobody there had any thing to say against it: infant baptism was held by all; but there was a question whether the law regarding circumcision which required the infant to be eight days old, did or did not apply in baptism. It was decided unanimously that the reasons for withholding circumcision till that age, did not apply in the case of baptism.

A witness still earlier than Origen is Irenæus, disciple of Polycarp, who could personally testify to what was believed in the churches of Christ about the middle of the second century. He says:

"Christ came to redeem all by himself; all, I say, who are born again unto God through him, *infants, children, boys,*

youths and the old. Therefore he passed through every age and became an infant to infants, sanctifying infants; he became a child among children to sanctify those of this age, giving them at the same time an example of piety, of justice and obedience; and for young men he became a young man, to set them an example, and to sanctify them to the Lord."

Neander, upon this passage, says:

"It is here of consequence to remark particularly that infants (*infantes*) are expressly distinguished from children (*parvuli*), to whom Christ can serve as an example; and that these infants are represented as being only capable of receiving an objective salvation from Christ, who appeared in an age and condition similar to theirs. This salvation is imparted to them in consideration of their being born again in reference to God through Christ. In Irenæus the new birth and baptism are intimately connected, and it would be difficult for any one to imagine any thing else than baptism as meant by the new birth, when used in reference to this

age. Infant baptism also here appears the means by which the principle imparted through Christ to human nature from its very earliest development, might be appropriated to the salvation of children."

Now we may set aside the theology of Irenæus; we may disregard his ideas as to the meaning and effects of baptism; but we can profitably consult him as to what was the custom of his time in the churches of Christ. Would Irenæus have used the language quoted, if Baptist views had pervaded the primitive church? Our Baptist friends believe that their children are in "the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity," until, growing up to years of intelligence, they are converted by the word and the Spirit of God. They believe that our Lord's command to his disciples to baptize believers, was meant to restrict baptism to such, and was so understood throughout the apostolic church. If such was the fact, it is exceedingly difficult to understand how Irenæus, living so near the days of the apostles, a Bishop, an esteemed Christian writer, one that wrote

against the heresies of his day, could have used the language quoted above.

Tertullian, who lived a little later than Irenaeus, is thought by some to be an opposer of infant baptism. He declares himself against haste in the baptism of children. Referring to our Lord's words, 'Forbid them not to come unto me,' he says :

“ Let them come, while they are growing up ; let them come, while they are learning, while they are being taught whither it is they come ; let them become Christians, after they have had an opportunity of knowing Christ. Why does the age of innocence hasten to the forgiveness of sins ? Men will act more prudently in secular affairs, if divine things are entrusted to those to whom worldly substance would not be entrusted. Let them first learn to seek salvation, that you may appear to give to one who asks it. For no less cause must the unwedded be deferred.”

Observe here, that Tertullian is not speaking of infants (*infantes*) but of child-

ren (*parvuli*). In the passage from Irenæus, previously quoted, these two are distinguished, and children are spoken of as those who might profit by the example of Christ. A heathen man is converted. He has a child three or four or five years old. Tertullian would have this child first instructed and made acquainted with Christ and then received on profession of faith. But on the supposition that there was a movement to introduce infant baptism in churches that had been strictly "Baptist" from apostolic times, would he have contented himself with such dissuasives as he uses? Would he not have appealed to the great unanswerable fact that no such thing had been known in the Apostolic churches? Let us imagine a Baptist of our day using such arguments against a proposal to introduce infant baptism in Baptist churches! Tertullian says: "Would you entrust to children worldly property? You know they are not competent to take care of it. Why then entrust to them spiritual goods, the things that pertain to life and godliness?"

It is evident that what he is combating is not infant baptism, but the baptism of children on profession of their faith while they are yet too young. If Tertullian was combating an endeavour to introduce infant baptism, how came it to pass that the Christian writers who followed him, and who were far better acquainted with the writers who had preceded them (Tertullian included) than we are, could have so positively affirmed, without fear of contradiction, that infant baptism had been practised without question from the times of the Apostles? How came it to pass that they could find no trace any where, at any period, of the existence of a body of Christians holding only adult baptism? If all the churches planted in the first century were on that foundation, how came it to pass that they so effectually disappeared leaving not a vestige behind? History might be challenged for any example of a similar disappearance. But Tertullian favours delay in baptism, not only in the case of children, but of adults. He says: "The delay of Baptism is more

nseful, according to every person's condition and disposition and even their age; but especially with regard to little children." We can easily see how this idea came into existence. It was believed that sins committed after baptism were more heinous and less pardonable than those committed previously. At a subsequent period this idea gained such ascendancy that baptism was deferred till death was thought to be at hand.

In the passage first quoted, Tertullian favors the postponement of baptism in the case of the unmarried. The argument is that such are liable to temptation; there is a possibility of their being led to commit sin; and if previously baptized then it would have been in vain that they should have been washed from their sins. It is the unfortunate confounding of the external sign with the inward grace, that is at the foundation of all that Tertullian says on this subject. But it is very evident that he is not opposing an innovation, a new custom, for in that case he would have spoken with all the

authority of the apostolic church, and instead of advancing an opinion of his own would have referred to the Apostolic institution. *

But some will say to us:

“By this reasoning you simply show that the early Church was not in harmony with the Scriptures, and the Scriptures are our only rule of faith. Infant baptism is not taught in the New Testament.”

We answer that it is very clearly taught, if not directly yet inferentially and demonstratively. The apostle Paul shall be our witness.

In the Epistle to the Galatians he shows that there has all along been only one covenant of redemption. Abraham was saved, just as we are, by simple faith:

“Even as Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness.

* Some writers think that Tertullian refers to infants generally. It may be so. This does not affect the force of our argument. Tertullian has not a word recommending a return to a former custom, but counsels a deviation from the existing custom, because of a crochet of his own regarding the significance of baptism.

Know ye therefore that they that are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the Gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham."

The Mosaic dispensation, given 430 years after Abraham, was intermediate between the patriarchs and the Messiah, without abrogating the covenant of faith under which alone men find salvation. "If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise." Paul uses an allegory to bring out his meaning. Abraham had a son born of a bondwoman, and a son by a freewoman. The former answers to Mt. Sinai, or the Mosaic dispensation, the latter to the "Jerusalem which is above, the mother of us all" The former was born after the flesh, the latter was by promise. "So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free." He disconnects his hearers from Moses to

attach them to Abraham, in this respect, that they are justified by faith.

In Romans (IV) Paul calls attention to the fact that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness, while he was yet uncircumcised.

“ And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had being yet uncircumcised : that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised ; that righteousness might be imputed to them also.”

The whole chapter should be read. As regards its essence, salvation through faith, the covenant made with Abraham is the covenant under which all believers are saved, from the beginning to the end of time. * We turn to Genesis xvii and read the words of God instituting this

* We have been met with this argument : “ You say that believers are the true seed of Abraham. If the promise relates to them, then the natural offspring of believers are not referred to in the promise, and have no place in the covenant.” The example of Abraham himself shows that the natural offspring are included.

covenant. God covenants to be the God of Abraham and of his seed; and circumcision is appointed as a sign of this covenant. This circumcision was a declaration that God was the God of the circumcised one, and that the latter was made over to God, to be for him in the world, directed by his laws, dependent on his guidance and help. And the participation of the seed of the believer in this sign, shows that the spiritual benefit promised, viz. that God should be his God, was available for the offspring. The following passage in Colossians shows that circumcision was the sign of an interior change.

“In whom ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ, buried with him in baptism,” etc. ii. 11, 12.

The same faith, on the ground of which he was justified, enabled him to present his child to God, and warranted him in looking for the blessing of God upon it. Thus it also was with every pious Jew; thus it is with every pious Christian who truly offers his child to God in baptism.

The putting off the body of the sins of the flesh; this is what it signified in the mind of God, when he gave the rite to believing Abraham and his offspring. The circumcised child, growing up, would be told that by the fact of his circumcision he was consecrated to God, that he belonged to God, to live for him; and that God was his God, bringing to his aid all divine power, so that he might be enabled to live for God. The question is not, what circumcision was thought to be by the degenerate and unbelieving Jews, but what it was in God's intention, and would have been to them, if they had been true to their part of the covenant. Any one who will consider the following expressions will see the spiritual significance of this rite:

“Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart.” Dent x. 16.

“The Lord thy God will circumcise thy heart and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul.” xxx. 6.

“Circumcise yourselves to the Lord and

take away the foreskins of your heart." Jer. iv. 4.

"How shall Pharaoh hear me, who am of uneircumcised lips." Ex. vi. 12.

"If then their uneircumcised hearts be humbled,—then will I remember my covenant." Lev. xxvi. 41, 42.

"Their ear is uneircumcised that they cannot hearken." Jer. vi. 10.

"All the house of Israel are uneircumcised in the heart." ix. 26.

"Uneircumcised in heart." Ezek xliv. iv. 7.

"Ye stiff-necked and uneircumcised in heart and ears." Acts vii. 51.

These expressions are most significant. They show most explicitly what God meant by the rite of circumcision. It meant consecration to the Lord: "Circumcise yourselves to the Lord." It meant love reigning in the heart. It meant humility of heart. It meant filial obedience. It meant a divine operation in the heart, the subject of promise. This was what it was in the purpose of God, and this is what it would have been in the experience of the Jews, if they had been spiritually, as

well as carnally, the descendants of Abraham. But for the most part they were not. They chose to rest in the form, neglecting that which was signified by it. Just as the great majority of those who practice infant baptism have done. But we have to consider the thing not as it is in its abuse, in its corruption, in its perversion, but as it is in God's intent. And the passages quoted from Scripture show this most unequivocally. "We are the circumcision," says Paul (Phil. iii 3), teaching the essential oneness of Christians of this dispensation with the believing people of God under the former. The same thing is taught in Romans xi. "If some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive-tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive-tree, boast not against the branches. They also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in." As the word 'circumcised' was freely used to denote consecration, so the word 'uncircumcised' was freely used to designate the opposite. Paul says that

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the Israelites were all baptized unto Moses, in the cloud and in the sea. By following him at that critical juncture they became publicly consecrated to him. The preposition *eis*, unto, is the same used in the formula of baptism, which, correspondingly translated would read, "baptizing them unto the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." So also 1 Cor. i. 13, "Were ye baptised unto the name of Paul?" The expression "in the name of the Lord Jesus" occurs repeatedly, and the Greek preposition is always *en*, *en to onomati*. And the fact that it is *eis* not *en* that is used in the formula of baptism, shows that the meaning is not 'in the name of' 'by the authority of' but 'unto.' The subject of baptism is, by that rite, presented to God, to be his; he is made over to the tri-une Jehovah. The infant Samuel, at the very dawn of his intelligence, was taught that he had been consecrated to the service of God, and he grew up with this as the profoundest conviction of his nature. We have known

instances of children who, from their birth, had been consecrated by their parents to the foreign mission work, and who grew up with the conviction that this was their vocation, and in due time entered upon the work. But the baptism of infants has no validity, unless the dedication then made is constantly maintained by the parents. There can be no greater mockery than to give the child away to Christ, and then, as it grows up, treat it habitually as though it were their own. There must be a daily recognition of the fact; and from the dawn of its intelligence the parents must prayerfully seek to make the child acquainted with the Saviour and his grace, and with its own relation to him. Any thing less than this will show that the baptism was not a real act of consecration.

As we have intimated, this privilege has been as fearfully abused in Christendom as circumcision was among the Jews. They rested in the rite itself, losing sight of the solemn obligations involved, and of the blessings belonging to a continuous

faith, and the children grew up uncircumcised in heart. So, in Christendom, whole nations and mighty churches have rested in the rite of baptism as though in itself, apart from the implied conditions,—it transported their children across the gulf that separates the uncovenanted from the covenanted. And under the circumstances, it is not to be wondered at that there should have been a reaction from the institution itself, and that many excellent Christians should have failed to see the Scriptural ground of a rite so corruptly practised. And inasmuch as the Baptist churches have helped to reawaken attention to the grand truths compromised and clouded by that corrupt practise, they are worthy of all honour. As between a church practising Infant Baptism, without a recognition of the true nature of the covenant then entered into, and a church that discards the practice altogether, we should think that, *cæteris paribus*, the blessing of the Lord might as well rest upon the Baptist church as upon the Paedo-Baptist. Nevertheless,

we fully believe, without the slightest question or hesitation, that Infant Baptism is of God, and that it is a most blessed institution where the parents maintain their plighted faith towards God. Where they do this, carefully guarding their children from adverse influence, we know of no reason why they should not confidently look for the saving influences of the Spirit of God, at the very beginning of moral life in their children. Were Christian parents generally brought to see the true nature of the covenant under which they present their children to God in baptism, the effect would be mightier than the results of any Revival the church has enjoyed in modern times.



